

# Department of Human Services

## Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, August 7, 2007

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Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394



<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
* Foster Care	2-3
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	4-10
Health Care	11-13
Child Custody	14-15
Early Childhood Development	16-18
Food Assistance	19-24
Energy Assistance	25
Migrant Workers	26-27
Poverty	28
DHS Employees	29-31

\*Important story at this spot

**Court fight over Mich. foster care system set for Tuesday**

August 6, 2007

By JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Attorneys for the state and a New York-based children's advocacy group suing Michigan over conditions in its foster care system are set to square off Tuesday in federal court over access to confidential state records.

The advocacy group Children's Rights, which is suing on behalf of 19,000 state foster children, says the Michigan Department of Human Services has twice failed to comply with its requests for documents about six children – the lead plaintiffs in the case – and dozens of other foster children who died while in state care since 2004.

**Advertisement**

In its responses, the DHS through the state Attorney General's Office said the information is deemed confidential under Michigan law. The DHS has literally millions of documents about foster children and the DHS has a legal obligation to uphold state privacy laws, the agency said.

Federal law should take precedence over state law, according to attorneys for Children's Rights. Besides, the advocacy group said, it is willing to sign agreements to keep confidential information about children private and not released to the public.

The DHS has identified 67 case files of children who have died under state supervision, Children's Rights said. Most apparently died of natural causes, but in the past two years, three foster children have been killed in state licensing foster homes.

U.S. District Court Judge Nancy Edmunds has scheduled a hearing on the requests for 1 p.m. Tuesday. A trial on the class-action lawsuit is scheduled for April.

**Find this article at:**<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070806/NEWS06/70806025/1002/BUSINESS01>☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Aug 6, 5:14 PM EDT

## **Judge to hear records dispute in foster care case**

DETROIT (AP) -- A federal judge on Tuesday will hear arguments over access to confidential state records in a lawsuit seeking changes in the state's foster care system.

New York-based Children's Rights, an advocacy group, is trying to see documents related to foster children who died while under state care. It says the Michigan Department of Human Services has not complied with requests for the documents.

DHS says the information is confidential.

U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds in Detroit has scheduled a hearing for 1 p.m. Tuesday.

The suit alleges that the state's foster care system has for years been plagued by shortcomings in resources and services that have resulted in inadequate physical and mental care and foster children being repeatedly moved between homes.

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# ClickOnDetroit.com

## Local 4 Exclusive: 5-Month-Old 'Seriously' Abused

POSTED: 3:20 pm EDT August 6, 2007

UPDATED: 8:17 pm EDT August 6, 2007

Pontiac police are investigating what they call a serious child abuse case of a 5-month-old girl.

Leila Quinn was taken to Children's Hospital on Aug. 3, for a broken left and right arm, a broken bone near her left shoulder, broken right ankle, and a bruised forehead, according to health officials.

Police said they believe Quinn's abuse may have started on July 31, but police were not able to see Quinn until Aug. 3.

Doctors said they do not believe the child's injuries are accidental.

Quinn's mother claims the baby's great grandmother was watching her when the abuse occurred.

Investigators said the elderly woman is in a walker and it's unlikely that she had the physical strength to cause those kind of injuries.

Pontiac prosecutors are remaining tight-lipped about the suspects. However, they did confirm to Local 4 News that they are looking at a number of possible suspects, including the child's mother.

"I am not for sure why they think that," said mother Latoya Porter

Porter is not allowed to have contact with the baby, according to police.

"I wake up every day to live to see her, and I can't see her," said Porter. "You have this child that your really wanted and really adored and somebody is going to take that child from you." That is terrible. "

A placement hearing for Quinn will be held Tuesday morning.

### RELATED TO STORY



**Video: Local 4's Hank Winchester Investigates 5-Month-Old Abuse Case**

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Tuesday, August 07, 2007

Detroit News

Macomb briefs

## **Mount Clemens: Pair held in drug case**

A Clinton Township couple who failed to appear in court last week on charges that they hid drugs in their children's diapers will be back before a judge this morning for a hearing after they were arrested in West Virginia. Marvin Blocker and Tanya Humphreys are charged with six drug counts and one count of second-degree child abuse. Police say they kept drugs in their house and near their five children. Blocker also is charged with resisting a police officer. They were taken into custody Sunday by agents from Action Bail Bonds.



## Candy-wrapper drug suspects caught, returned

Marvin Blocker and Tanya Humphreys skipped bail, were apprehended in Virginia.

By Gordon Wilczynski  
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A pair of accused drug dealers, sought on fugitive warrants after failing to appear for trial last week in Macomb County, were arrested Sunday in Virginia.

Marvin J. Blocker and Tanya R. Humphreys, both 24, were arrested without incident at Humphreys' stepfather's house in Natural Bridge, Va.

The were tracked down with the assistance of two security company representatives from Roanoke, who then drove the pair to Cleveland, where they were turned over to two bail bondsmen from Macomb County.

They were brought back to the Macomb County Jail late Monday by the owners of the two bail bond companies, Chris Roberts, of 24/7 Bail Bonds and Walt Myska, of Action Bail Bonds. The two companies had posted bonds for the pair.

Blocker and Humphreys are scheduled to appear today in Macomb Circuit Court.

They were initially arrested after police raided their mobile home in January.

"There was a lot of shaking the bushes and talking to everyone we could to get a feel where Marvin and Tanya were hiding," said Roberts. "Once we told people in the Colchester-Joy Road area that there was a reward for information leading to their arrests, a lot of people came forward and offered us information."

Roberts said he and Myska had fliers made up with the pictures and names of the suspects. The fliers were posted on the north end of Clinton Township.

Roberts said police were informed that a family member had a Virginia address on his driver license and a further investigation determined that the house is owned by Robert Vittigglio, Humphreys' stepfather.

The friend gave Roberts and Myska directions to the home.

See CAUGHT, Page 7A

Another person admitted that he drove Blocker and Humphreys to the bus station last week and paid for their one-way trip to Virginia.

Blocker and Humphreys have been charged with second-degree child abuse, selling crack cocaine, Ecstasy, marijuana and prescription drugs.

Warrants for their arrests were issued Aug. 2 when the pair failed to show up for trial before Macomb Circuit Judge Edward Servitto.

Humphreys' attorney, Richard Glanda, said several weeks ago that his client had planned on pleading guilty. Blocker had previously decided against pleading guilty.

Humphreys and Blocker were accused by Clinton Township police with selling drugs in candy wrappers from their apartment near Gratiot Avenue and Joy Boulevard. Earlier in the police investigation Macomb Circuit Judge Antonio Viviano reduced the bond for Blocker from \$300,000 to \$100,000 and for Humphreys from \$100,000 and \$30,000.

Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith criticized the lower bond and said the failure to appear in court confirmed his belief.

Viviano, the chief circuit judge, said the lower bonds were reasonable.

Five children lived in the house where the drugs were kept and sold, including crack cocaine in baby diapers and cocaine in baby jars, according to police.

Blocker is the father of all five children while Humphreys is the mother of two.

Both bondsmen said they worked vigorously to apprehend the suspects because they would have lost a considerable amount of money if the pair had not been caught.

Macomb Daily photo by Gordon Wilczynski

Fugitives Marvin Blocker and Tanya Humphreys are brought back to Macomb County by bail bondsmen Walt Myska of Actions Bail Bonds, left, and Chris Roberts of 24/7 Bail Bonds, right.

Candy-wrapper drug suspects caught, returned

- Marvin Blocker and Tanya Humphreys skipped bail, were apprehended in Virginia.

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08/06/2007

## **Amber Alert leads to criminal charges for dad**

**Kate Finneren-Hessling , The Huron Daily Tribune**

**UNIONVILLE** — The father of a 2-year-old boy who was the subject of an Amber Alert issued last week was arraigned Friday in Tuscola County District Court on arson and malicious destruction of property charges.

According to the Tuscola County 71-B District Court Office, Jason Gary Allen, 32, of the Alma/Ithaca area, was arraigned on one count of arson — preparation to burn property of \$20,000 or more, one count of attempted arson of a dwelling house, and one count of malicious destruction of personal property valued at \$1,000 or more but less than \$20,000.

According to a press release from the Tuscola County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, an Amber Alert was issued about 3:30 p.m. Thursday in an attempt to locate and ensure the safety of Allen's 2-year-old son.

Later that evening, Allen and his son were located shortly after 11 p.m. by DeWitt Police in a hotel room in DeWitt Township just north of Lansing, According to Sgt. Scott Jones, of the Tuscola County Sheriff's Office.

DeWitt Police searched the hotel room and found Allen and the boy inside.

According to Jones, the child had some minor injuries when he was found at the hotel and was taken to a hospital for medical treatment.

Jones reports police began an investigation after Allen's ex-girlfriend, who lives in Unionville, reported to police she was having problems after she broke off a relationship with Allen.

No individual known to law enforcement had contact with Allen after 9 a.m. Thursday and both his whereabouts and that of his 2-year-old son were unknown, according to the prosecutor's press release.

During their investigation Thursday afternoon, however, officers learned Allen had been observed by a neighbor engaging in assaultive and threatening behavior, both inside and outside the Unionville residence, toward his 2-year-old son for about an hour early Thursday morning.

Jones said the Michigan State Police Crime Lab was called to the home to collect

blood evidence found inside on a pillow and outside of the home. Blood also was located on bedding inside the residence on a variety of items near a child's blanket/towel, according to the prosecutor's press release.

The press release said presumptive tests taken for human blood were positive in the unattached garage of the residence.

Evidence of the use of chlorine bleach was found both inside the residence and in the driveway at a location between the residence and garage, according to the press release, which states chlorine bleach commonly is used by people to destroy biological evidence.

In a statement released Friday, Tuscola County Prosecuting Attorney Mark E. Reese commended officers for their exemplary work on the case.

He said the Amber Alert worked in the exact manner for which it was designed (because it was the Amber Alert for Allen and his son that caught the attention of DeWitt Police who noticed Allen's red Buick in the parking lot of a hotel). "Through extraordinary law enforcement coordination and effort, a missing 2-year-old child was located and returned to safety," Reese said.

Allen could face a maximum of 10 years in prison if convicted of the first count of arson — preparation to burn property of \$20,000. The second and third counts, attempted arson of a dwelling house and malicious destruction of property valued at \$1,000 or more but less than \$20,000, each carry a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

The Tuscola County District Court Office said bond was set at \$500,000/10 percent. Allen currently is lodged in the Tuscola County Jail.

A pretrial hearing has been scheduled for 8:45 a.m. Aug. 10.

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[Back](#)

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Article published Aug 7, 2007

Health-care legislation exceeds reach

Expanded children's insurance program covers too many adults

Whenever federal lawmakers address children's health insurance, it's no wonder Americans sit up and take notice. Children's welfare is important - and the congressional battle over increasing their health care is an issue that draws strong opinions.

That's the case with legislation to expand the popular State Children's Health Insurance Program, a decade-old plan that provides federal funding for uninsured children. Last week, the Senate and House passed bills to expand SCHIP. The Senate authorized \$35 billion over five years. The House version called for \$50 billion for the same period.

The two bills must be reconciled, of course, but their aim, to throw more money at SCHIP, appears to be well-intentioned but plagued with some significant flaws.

President Bush already announced he would veto the legislation. The president opposes any spending increase for the program - and his reasons cannot be dismissed as simply anti-child.

The program's coverage - low-income adults as well as children - raises legitimate concern as to why it necessarily needs to expand. In Michigan, for example, less than 33,000 children were enrolled in MICHild, the state's version of SCHIP, last year. That's a fraction of the estimated 160,000 children state officials say are without health insurance.

The value of SCHIP is as a safety net for children of poor and low-income children. Instead, it has become a Band-Aid for poor and low-income adults.

Bush signed federal waivers that enabled the program to include adults. Last year in Michigan, 65,000 adults were enrolled in MICHild, according to the *Battle Creek Enquirer* - more than twice the number of children.

Moreover, the legislation's funding penalizes the elderly. It cuts federal payments to private insurance companies that cover disabled and elderly patients through Medicare.

Substantial tobacco-tax increases would account for the bulk of the program's funds.

The failings of America's health-insurance system are impossible to ignore. At least 44 million Americans don't have any health insurance at all, and the quest for affordable health care remains a key national priority.

SCHIP clearly cannot solve the problem. At best, it can address a clear aspect - the importance of ensuring children of poor and low-income families receive the medical treatment they need.

That shouldn't come at the expense of the elderly and the disabled - and tax dollars devoted to ensuring children are covered shouldn't also underwrite expanding numbers of adults.

Whenever the House and Senate reconcile the bill's two versions, it is likely the president will invoke his veto. Given the close House vote - 225-204 - it's unlikely that Congress would muster the necessary votes for an override.

That's just as well. For all the debate over SCHIP's importance, increased funding essentially would serve as an attempt to establish a beach head for national health care. That's a separate debate, and it ought to be waged without using children as fodder.

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## Health screenings offered to homeless during event

**FLINT**

**THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION**

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

**By Lindsey Poisson**

**lpoisson@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6249**

FLINT - Sometimes it might come down to a choice: a roof overhead or a doctor visit.

Whether it's cost, transportation or not knowing where to go, many impoverished and homeless people face roadblocks when it comes to health.

"If you have only a certain pot of money, you can only spend it on certain things," said Jane O'Dell, permanent supportive housing supervisor for the Shelter of Flint. "Even if they have the opportunity to purchase (health insurance), they take the chance and don't purchase it."

Access to services and information might be easier with the one-stop approach of the Health Care for the Homeless Health Fair on Friday at Carriage Town Ministries Family Center, 705 Garland St., Flint. Participants can visit with more than 30 health agencies and receive free health screenings for vision, hearing, cholesterol, HIV and other conditions.

"We're getting more and more homeless people in Genesee County," said Tom Knight, Carriage Town Ministries' development director. "A lot of them have health issues, and a lot of them don't know where to go to take care of these health issues."

To help advertise the event, posters and brochures will be left at shelters and other locations.

"It would do a lot of people good," Richard Michalak, 51, said of the health fair, adding that he frequently uses Carriage Town's services. "They got people who have drinking habits, people who've got drug problems."

Michalak, who takes insulin for his diabetes and other medication for related illnesses, said he would most likely attend the fair.

Although he currently is covered by the Genesee Health Plan, a limited health benefit program provided to low-income county residents, he might need a plan in about a year.

"If I can get better medical insurance, yeah, I would go to it," he said. "If they say in November (2008) that I can't reapply, I'm going to be screwed."

Obesity and dental are major health problems the homeless face, O'Dell said. But with cheap, unhealthy foods and long waiting lists for dental care, it's hard for them to make a better choice.

A fair with a relaxed, fun atmosphere might help open people up to ask questions and get them interested in their own health, O'Dell said.

### QUICK TAKE

Health fair for the homeless

The first annual Health Care for the Homeless Health Fair will be 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday at the Carriage Town Ministries Family Center, 705 Garland St., Flint.

Attendees will receive free health screenings, information and brochures about available services.

Entertainment will be available for children, including face painting and a bounce house.

\*\*\*

People should come and know what benefits they're entitled to, said Markisa Holmes, homeless outreach coordinator of Hamilton Community Health Network, which is co-sponsoring the event with Carriage Town Ministries.

If the fair is successful, it will become a regular event, Knight said.

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**MOUNT CLEMENS** -- Accused murderer Stephen Grant likely will have no say in who adopts his two children, a Macomb Circuit judge said Monday.

Circuit Judge John Foster also ordered all parties to refrain from "badmouthing" anyone involved in the adoption battle over Grant's children, ages 6 and 4. There were eight attorneys present at the adoption hearing, representing either Grant, his sister, the Michigan Department of Human Services, or relatives of Grant's slain wife.

Grant, who is accused of murdering and dismembering his wife, Tara, sat quietly during the proceedings. Foster told Grant he would likely not be allowed to choose who adopts his children.

"Mr. Grant, you have a choice: you can voluntarily terminate your parental rights to allow an adoption -- but it will be an adoption you can't direct. If you don't, we'll hold a hearing to determine whether your parental rights should be terminated."

Grant nodded but did not say anything.

Grant's children are living in Ohio with their maternal aunt, Alicia Standerfer, who wants to adopt them. A judge granted her temporary custody of the children. But Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski, also has filed a petition with the court to adopt the children.

Utykanski's attorney, Melinda Deel, argued that Grant still has a right to give consent to his sister adopting his children.

"The law is clear. If Mr. Grant's rights have not been terminated, then he can consent to an adoption by his sister," Deel said.

The Utykanskis "love and adore their niece and nephew," Deel said. "There's an important need for the children to have both sets of relatives in their lives, and (the Utykanskis) would be willing to sign an affidavit to ensure both sides of the family would get ample visitation."

But Standerfer's attorney, Michael Smith, said the law makes the children's best interests the most important consideration.

"It's not Mr. Grant who makes this decision; it's the court," Smith said. "The law says the court must first make sure the children's interests are taken care of."

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Detroit Free Press

Macomb County news briefs

August 7, 2007

## **Grant told he can terminate parental rights**

A Macomb County Circuit judge told slaying suspect Stephen Grant on Monday that he can voluntarily terminate his parental rights to his children and if he doesn't, a hearing will be held to determine if his rights should be terminated.

Judge John C. Foster also ordered relatives seeking custody of Grant's two children to be interviewed by a counselor with the court's family counseling service if both sides want to continue their custody battle for the children, ages 4 and 6.

The children remain in the care of Ohioan Alicia Standerfer, the sister of Tara Grant, who police say was killed by her husband and the children's father. Stephen Grant, 37, is accused of strangling and dismembering his wife.

The children have been living with Standerfer since their father was arrested in early March. Standerfer and Kelly Utykanski, Stephen Grant's sister, both want to keep the children permanently.

The next hearing is scheduled for Aug. 27.



## Muskegon Chronicle

### Closing the gap: Head Start pre-schoolers reap benefits of program

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

By Lynn Moore

[lmoores@muskegonchronicle.com](mailto:lmoores@muskegonchronicle.com)

Amanda Rutkowski knew her young daughter wasn't quite ready for school.

She would rather whine than verbalize her wants or needs. Her social skills needed help too.

What a difference a year in Head Start has made.

"It helped her a lot," Rutkowski said of 4-year-old Morgan, who's headed to kindergarten this fall. "I don't know if she'd be as advanced now without the Head Start program. With the social skills, I know she wouldn't be as far as she is now."

Children like Morgan have successfully closed the gap in achievement that often plagues those from low-income homes, according to a study that followed the progress of children who attended the federally funded Head Start preschool program in Muskegon and Oceana counties.

By third grade, children who had attended Head Start continued to outpace their peers in reading, the study shows.

With kindergarten curriculums becoming more demanding, preschool has become almost a necessity. While more affluent families can afford to provide private preschool opportunities to young children, Head Start fills the gap for lower-income families.

At Head Start, for example, Morgan learned how to write all her letters and use scissors. She even learned table manners, including how to serve herself, said Rutkowski, who volunteered often in the Head Start program at Muskegon's Glenside School.

"They've all come a very long ways," Rutkowski said of the Head Start students, remembering in particular a young girl who overcame extreme anxiety over being separated from her mother.

Morgan and her classmates are lucky. Funding for Head Start doesn't come close to meeting the needs of all children, said Stuart Jones, director of Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana. The local Head Start program -- which is operated by the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District in school districts throughout the two counties -- has openings for 924 3- and 4-year-olds, but Jones estimates about 2,000 children are eligible.

A waiting list to get into the free program had more than 200 names on it last year, Jones said.

Many of the openings are in the northern and eastern sections of Muskegon County.

Tamera Gramza, coordinates the White Lake Area Head Start program, which serves children in Whitehall, Holton, Montague, North Muskegon and Reeths-Puffer school districts. She said while Head Start optimally provides youngsters two years of preschool before they start kindergarten, all 3-year-olds in her jurisdiction were on a waiting list last year.

"It is very sad that children sit on a waiting list; that it's not available to every preschooler," Gramza said.

A 2006 "Impact Study" completed for Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana compared assessment test scores



of students who attended Head Start with those who had not. It found that overall, children who attended Head Start were on par with their peers or even slightly ahead of them, when they started school.

By third grade, the first year students take the Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests, students who had attended Head Start scored better than their peers on MEAP reading tests, though not as well in math.

Jones said he believes the improved performance in reading reflects the heavy emphasis on literacy in the Head Start program. Local Head Start officials will use the information to boost their math curriculum, Jones said, adding that the math scores are "proof" that an academic achievement gap exists between children who are low-income and those who aren't.

Head Start's impact on student performance was even more pronounced in school districts with high concentrations of poor children because they are less likely to attend preschool other than Head Start. In other areas, it is more probable that students who didn't attend Head Start instead attended a different preschool program.

In Muskegon Heights, 62.5 percent of the third-graders who had been in Head Start as preschoolers passed the math and reading portions of the MEAP test. Among third-graders who weren't in Head Start, 55.6 percent passed reading and just 22.2 percent passed math.

"National studies show that poverty is a major risk factor for academic performance," Jones said. By third grade, studies show that for students falling behind academically, "it's very hard for them to recover."

He said there is a plan to follow the students through fifth grade, and possibly beyond, to see if the effects of Head Start eventually fade significantly.

Though the study results were a boost for Head Start staff, they continue to struggle with funding restrictions that limit their impact. Two years ago, funding dropped by 1 percent, and last year it was flat, Jones said.

Head Start funding has not kept up with inflation since 2002, forcing cuts rather than enhancements as research continues to emphasize the importance of early childhood education, according to the National Head Start Association.

A survey by the NHSA found that more than half of Head Start programs nationwide have had to make cuts in services.

Locally, waiting lists continue to grow. In January 2004, 167 children were waiting to get into Head Start. A year later, that number grew to 204, and in 2006, it was 245. Most children on the waiting lists are 3-year-olds, with priority given to 4-year-olds -- the vast majority of whom get some Head Start experience as long as their parents enroll them before school starts in the fall, officials said.

In addition to providing children early building blocks for academics, Head Start provides nutrition education, music experiences and assists parents in securing medical and dental care for their children. Bus transportation and meals also are provided for the half-day programs.

Head Start also provides socialization that is critical for preparing students for school, said Pat Farmer, a kindergarten teacher for Muskegon's Oakview Elementary School. She said it's usually obvious to her which of her students have had Head Start or some other preschool.

"They're used to waiting their turns and listening and raising their hands," Farmer said. "They do need the socialization."

When she taught Head Start 30 years ago, Farmer said, she was told not to teach letters and their sounds; "that that was for kindergarten." Now kindergarten is more like first grade, with children writing sentences and reading simple books by the end of the year.

"We're pushing the kids so much farther now than we used to," Farmer said. "And they can do it. They can learn to read and write."

One mother said she thinks that's a little "too intense sometimes."

"I'm just amazed at what the children have to know," said Petra Tester of Montague, who has had two children attend Head Start. "I'm amazed what my children have to know in kindergarten -- they're teaching first and second-grade curriculum in kindergarten."

While she was in Head Start last year, Tester's daughter Nykole learned the sounds of the alphabet, how to write her name and the names of family members and to do simple addition and subtraction.

"That's a lot for a 5-year-old, I think," Tester said.

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Published August 7, 2007



(Photo by Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)  
Kasar Colwell gets ready to bite into a big strawberry as he eats lunch free of charge with other kids recently in the Lansing Parks and Recreation Department Kids Camp at Letts Community Center in Lansing.

#### **Area locations serving free meals during the summer**

The following locations will continue serving free meals to children 18 and under, and older people who have physical or mental disabilities, through Thursday or Friday. Other participating sites already have closed for the summer. Listed are name, address, breakfast time and lunch time:  
Baker/Donora Focus Center 840 Baker St. 8:30 a.m. 11:30 a.m.

Beekman Center\* 2901 Wabash Road Not serving 11:30 a.m.

Black Child & Family Institute 835 W. Genesee St. 8 a.m. 11:30 a.m.

Boys & Girls Club of Lansing 4315 Pleasant Grove Road 8 a.m. Noon

Countryside Manor 14379 Webster Road, Bath Not serving 11:30 a.m.

Faith United Methodist Church & South Lansing Ministries 4301 S. Waverly Road 8:30 a.m. 11:45 a.m.

Foster Community Center 200 N. Foster Ave. 9:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.

Gier Community Center 2400 Hall St. 9:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.

Grand River Elementary School 1107 E. Grand River Ave. 9:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.

- Hildebrant Housing 3122 N. Turner St. 8 a.m. Noon
- LaRoy Froh Housing 2400 Reo Road 8 a.m. Noon
- Letts Community Center 1220 W. Kalamazoo St. 9:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.
- Lewton Elementary School 2000 Lewton Place 8 a.m. 11 a.m.
- LMT Community Center 2645 W. Holmes Road 9 a.m. Noon
- Mt. Vernon Housing 3338 N. Waverly Road 8 a.m. Noon
- North Neighborhood Center 730 W. Maple St. Not serving Noon
- South Side Community Coalition 2101 W. Holmes Road 8:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.
- On the Web
  - Visit [www.michigan.gov/sfsp](http://www.michigan.gov/sfsp) for more information about the state's Summer Food Service Program, which uses federal funds to provide free meals to children in low-income areas.

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# Demand rises for free lunch programs

Ailing economy takes toll on area, supervisor says

Nicole Geary  
Lansing State Journal

Seventeen-year-old Nagee Hakim helps kids open little milk cartons.

He encourages them to eat their celery.

If not for the summer camp at Letts Community Center, he believes some of them wouldn't eat nutritious meals while school's out - or much at all.

"I've been through it a few times myself," said Hakim, a volunteer from Sexton High School who had bare cupboards at home when he was younger. "I want them to have a bright future. So I advise kids who aren't eating to come."

And this summer, local children are coming in larger numbers to community centers, churches and apartment complexes across the city serving federally funded free meals.

Coordinators at Lansing School District report more than 43,000 lunches have been dished up so far.

Not counting breakfasts, that's on pace to equal about 100 more meals per day than in previous years.

"We're definitely higher this year," said food service supervisor Teri Chadwell, adding that Michigan's troubled economy is likely to blame.

Overall, sites across the state also have been feeding more low-income children during the months when school cafeterias stay closed. The average daily July attendance rose by 18 percent between 2002 and 2006.

But Gloria Zunker, who oversees the state's Summer Food Service Program, said participation isn't growing nearly fast enough to meet the need.

Only about 15 percent of the state's public school students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches during the school year - a key indicator of families' financial situations - take advantage of free summertime meals.

Meanwhile, the percentage of Michigan kids living in poverty - a measure that accounts for children in even tougher circumstances - is growing three times faster than the national average, according to the 2007 Kids Count report.

"We believe there might be kids going hungry or not eating as much as they should," Zunker said. "We want to keep children well nourished during the summer so they don't lose ground with their education."

Despite recent growth, she said the program actually saw a decline in participation for 15 years until 2004.

Lansing's numbers also actually declined before the current upswing.

That's why the state Education Department, which assumed administration of the program in 2004, ramped up efforts to promote potential benefits for kids among families and coordinating agencies.

Officials also made changes to simplify how providers receive reimbursement for food and labor costs; some school districts still choose to offer free meals on their own to avoid the cumbersome process.

In the meantime, a pending congressional bill could bring the summer food program to more communities by allowing schools with smaller percentages of low-income children to participate. Zunker said Waverly Community Schools provided meals last summer but couldn't this year because the number of qualifying students decreased.

In Lansing schools, the only tri-county organization providing the service, more than two-thirds of all students qualify for free or reduced lunches.

For a family of four, that means their annual household income must be \$38,203 or less for a discount, or \$26,845 or less for a free pass in the checkout line.

The percentage of kids participating during the school year has grown annually since the 2000-01 school year, when 54 percent were eligible districtwide.

"What we see in a school district is a microcosm of what's happening in society as a whole," Student Services Director Jim Davis said. "We just have to look at how we can meet the need as it currently exists. If we can put our summer food program in any area of the city reaching kids, we're going to do it."

Lansing workers assemble meals at Otto Middle School before they're delivered to 33 different locations. That program is more than 20 years old.

Letts Community Center coordinator Robin Anderson-King has been satisfied to see how a well-balanced, free breakfast and lunch affects kids.

"They can play longer and not tire out as quickly," she said. "It actually helps them keep level, physically and emotionally."

Contact Nicole Geary at 377-1066 or [ngeary@lsj.com](mailto:ngeary@lsj.com).

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Published August 7, 2007



(Photo by Greg DeRuiter/Lansing State Journal)  
Evaluating the food: Elizabeth Smith, 3, of Mulliken checks out some tomatoes held up by her mother Jennifer while they shop recently for fresh fruit and vegetables at the Project Fresh kick-off event in Charlotte.

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## Good eats: Program helps bring fresh, local produce within families' reach

Brendan Bouffard  
Lansing State Journal

CHARLOTTE - The passing spectators were curious, but reluctant.

"If it's free, you have to try it," said Mona Ellard, scooping out a cup of zucchini casserole for visitors at the Barry-Eaton District Health Department in Charlotte.

"If you don't like it, you can throw it away."

Her pitch worked.

Almost every person who tried the unfamiliar concoction wanted to know her recipe. And that's the plan.

Ellard, director of Michigan State University Extension, was working Wednesday afternoon at the kick-off event for Project Fresh, a program designed to get families eating more fruits and vegetables.

The initiative, now in its twelfth year, is for parents participating in Women, Infants and Children (WIC), a government-sponsored program that supplements nutritional needs for low-income families.

WIC parents who partake in Project Fresh receive a \$20 coupon for fresh fruits and vegetables that they can use at local farmer's markets.

MSU Extension helps the program by providing nutritional information for the families, teaching them how to prepare the fruits and vegetables and shop for them in an economically viable way.

Rachele Davidson, 27, of Charlotte, said her two daughters love eating fresh produce but the high cost can be a burden.

"Fruits and vegetables are expensive," she said as she signed up for the program. "But they're so good."

At Wednesday's kick-off event, more than 50 families joined Project Fresh.

For their convenience, a farmers market was set up in the health department's parking lot.

Two of the farmers outside, Mark and Sharon Lawcock, of Mulliken, sat fanning themselves in a small tent filled with fresh produce they had picked the previous day from their 110-acre farm.

All of their produce was locally grown without any pesticides.

The husband-and-wife team agreed that in the past more people ate fresh vegetables.

"Every family had a garden," said Sharon Lawcock, 54. "These people in town just don't have the choice."

Numbers from the Centers for Disease Control's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System reflect a need for more vegetable consumption in Michigan.

According to a survey from 2005, only 22.8 percent of people in the state eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

Heather Sanders, a health educator at the department, explained why so many people go without the suggested servings of produce.

Some might not know enough about how to store and prepare them, she said, but others simply can't purchase them on a tight budget.

"When you are at the grocery store, the healthier your cart is, the more expensive it tends to be," she said.

"Most of these people just want some help."

Contact Brendan Bouffard at 377-1061 or [bbouffard@lsj.com](mailto:bbouffard@lsj.com).



Detroit Free Press

Macomb County news briefs

## **COUNTY-WIDE: Energy seminars set for lower-income families**

Two Macomb County seminars this month are to provide lower-income families with tips on how to reduce energy costs.

The first seminar will be 6-8 p.m. on Thursday at Greater New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, 58527 Delanie St., in New Haven. The second will be 6-8 p.m. on Aug. 14 at St. Mark Catholic Church, 4257 Bart Ave., in Warren.

Seating is limited and registration is required, though there are income requirements. For details or to make reservations, call the county at 586-469-6329 and leave a message.

Compiled by Steve Neavling, Christina Hall and Dan Cortez.

# The County Press

## Migrant program prepares students for success in school

by JENNIFER DECKER  
STAFF REPORTER

Teachers in the summer migrant program cram as much learning into the six-week session as possible.

This year's program in the Imlay City Community Schools had approximately 85 students, said Angie McCoy, summer migrant program director.

"We get the computer program with samples of math and language arts and get ready for MEAPs (Michigan Educational Assessment Program)," McCoy said.

McCoy has been involved with the summer migrant program for 17 years.

"I enjoy the program. I enjoy working with the kids," she said. "Whenever the kids see me they ask, 'When does the migrant program start?' Sometimes they come to my house. They look forward to starting."

McCoy said families are eligible for the summer migrant program for three years as long as a parent or guardian works in agriculture.

"If families move and come back and work in agriculture they qualify for three years," McCoy said. "Many have families that stay for three years and then they're no longer eligible."

McCoy said if there's a secret to the migrant program's success it's her staff.

"They make learning fun for the kids. We provide a variety of experiences. We went on field trips to Cranbrook, the Detroit Science Center, and Waterford Wave Park," McCoy said.

Jamie Spurgeon is a teacher in the migrant program. Her class was working on year-end assessments last Tuesday.

"We do a little bit of everything while concentrating on math and language arts," said Jamie Spurgeon, migrant program teacher. "We get them ready to start MEAPs. We focus on strategies in reading."

Spurgeon said the program concentrates on reading. Older children use the "Read Natural" program and read novels. Younger students do accelerated reading.

Students are tested for comprehension after they read a book, McCoy said and added third-grader Josselin Zepeda read the most books this summer—24—and passed the test.

For every book they read, students in the migrant program are rewarded with a ticket that can be spent in the program's makeshift school store. The program's store contains small prizes such as bracelets, stickers and pencils. If students score 100% on the test they get two tickets.

Janet Lorenzen teaches fourth- and fifth-graders in the program.

"We're working on Study Island—math and language arts," she said. "The state requires curriculum and this program. Students in the migrant program play 'catch up' here. It prepares them for the fall. Some of them are above their grade level."

Laree Schlund teaches first- through third-graders in the program.

"They learn a lot of reading and computer skills. Basically, we're getting them ready to take MEAPs," Schlund said. "We've done a lot of reading on computers. They enjoy each other as a group. A lot of the students have cousins and that's how they found out about the program.

"When they move four or five times in a school year they miss out, but it's not their fault. It's very difficult for them," Schlund said.

To ensure good health, a fair was held during the program. Students also received a dental cleaning, McCoy said.

McCoy said the program recently had a parents' night. Parents were surveyed as to what they thought about the migrant program.

"Most of the parents were positive," McCoy said. "Without the program, (students) probably wouldn't do math or read that many books."

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### More working families live in poverty

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

Michigan's stagnant economy has been hard on just about everyone, but it has been especially tough on one growing group -- the working poor.

According to the Michigan League for Human Services, which recently released its newest report on work and poverty, the number of families in which at least one adult holds a job, but live below the poverty line, now makes up 7.8 percent of all working households in Michigan.

That's 88,330 families living below the poverty level -- \$16,242 for a family of three; \$20,444 for a family of four. Seven years ago, 72,288 working households in Michigan existed below the poverty level.

Although much attention has been paid to Michigan's unemployment rate, less attention has been paid to the plight of those who work, day in and day out, and still are unable to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

For extremely low-income families, the issues include workers' inadequate job skills and the state's emphasis on diversifying the economy with sectors that require high-skilled workers.

The Michigan League for Human Services, which last assessed the plight of the working poor in 2003, has lauded the state for increasing the state minimum wage and for instituting an Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income families. It also gave kudos for the state's 21st Century Workforce Strategy and the state's Jobs, Education and Training program.

But it will be years before the effects of these programs, aimed at training workers in skills that will be much in demand, will be realized. Despite health-care jobs going unfilled and the demand for people in the health sector expected to grow, it will take years for low-skilled workers to obtain the education and skills they would need to qualify.

Although low educational attainment has often been linked to poverty, one statistic in this year's report jumped out: About 42 percent of working families living below the poverty line had at least one worker who had some post-high school education.

This statistic suggests that helping high school graduates choose training for high-demand careers -- and helping them complete that training -- would mean fewer working families languishing in poverty years from now.

That's an important goal for Michigan.

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Lansing State Journal

August 7, 2007

## **Employees to meet for retirees' luncheon**

The Ingham County Department of Social Service, Family Independence Agency and Department of Human Services employees will meet for their annual retirees' luncheon at 12:30 p.m. Aug. 16 at Flap Jack Family Restaurant, 6927 S. Cedar St.

If you are able to join them, call Marge Brooks at 882-2762 or send an e-mail to Judy Niles at [judy\\_niles@yahoo.com](mailto:judy_niles@yahoo.com).



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Published August 7, 2007



(Photo by Lansing State Journal file photo)

River before latest water level decrease: A passerby feeds ducks near the Brenke Fish Ladder on Grand River recently in Lansing. The highest white mark seen on the river wall was the height of the river before its recent decrease in water level.

#### Rid the river of bikes, armchairs

- To help in the cleanup effort, visit [drawdowncleanup.org](http://drawdowncleanup.org). The event runs 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Riverfront Park across North Grand Avenue from Lansing Community College. Parking is free for volunteers that day at the LCC garage.
- Event organizational meetings are open to volunteers as well. Meetings are held Mondays 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Gone Wired Cafe on East Michigan Avenue.

## Grand River to say goodbye to debris with organized cleanup

Area volunteers still needed for Aug. 18 cleaning of riverbed

Christine Rook  
Lansing State Journal

Almost 60 people have signed up to rid the Grand River of its less-than-natural features.

Good riddance bicycles and soggy recliners. Goodbye exposed bits of rebar.

Organizers of Draw Down Clean Up say they need 200 people to pull off a riverbed cleaning Aug. 18, when more than 250 pieces of junk are to be removed from the water and banks.

Some of the trash is sizeable - abandoned pipes, pylons and chunks of fencing.

As of 2 p.m. Monday, 59 people had signed up for the event. Nine having joined since Friday.

Lansing resident Julann Vittone, 51, was one of the first to volunteer.

"I'll probably be doing a lot of photography that day so we have a history of what's going on," she said.

Vittone also plans to run water and food out to the volunteers assigned to work the mucky banks.

Not every volunteer must wade into the water.

Some are needed to do what Vittone has been assigned. Others will staff a registration tent and prepare food.

The goal is to clear the riverbed of decades of accumulated stuff while the water level is low.

Water now is flowing four feet below the normal height and has been since July. That's when the Lansing Board of Water & Light drew down the level so inspectors could check out a dam near Old Town.

Normal water flow will resume by Sept. 2, again hiding anything that isn't collected Aug. 18.

"I guess I'm motivated to do something because I couldn't find anyone else who was," said cleanup organizer Yvonne LeFave.

The 42-year-old Lansing woman said people who can't donate time can donate money. As of Friday, her group had raised \$200 and more than \$1,000 in donated items such as waived dumpster fees.

Doris Asher, 63, wrote the group a check for \$100. She'll be out of state the weekend of the cleanup but wants to help anyway.

Some might argue the junk should be left, because when the water level rises it will once again hide everything.

But Vittone wants a clean, clear river.

She sees a pristine Grand River as crucial to a city searching for a new identity now that manufacturing has waned.

"We're the capital city of the great state of Michigan," she said. "We should be working on reclaiming our waterways."

Contact Christine Rook at 377-1261 or [clrook@lsj.com](mailto:clrook@lsj.com).